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Written Testimony of Youthpraise Racial Equity Specialist Alfonso Mayfield
in Support of HF 922, HF 947, and HF 416


Chair Mariani and Members of the Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy Committee:

Youthpraise is pleased to support the important juvenile justice provisions contained in HF 922, HF 947, and HF 416.

With a mission of “increasing equity with and for Minnesota’s Indigenous, low-income, and racially diverse youth,” Youthpraise focuses its statewide work on three key impact areas—learning & leadership, economic opportunity, and health & safety. Our efforts to advance the health and safety of Minnesota’s youth include partnering with the Office of Justice Programs in the MN Department of Public Safety. The purpose of this partnership, which I help lead, is to improve juvenile justice data collection and analysis, identify effective and promising efforts in eliminating racial and ethnic disparities, and engaging communities of color in helping to build a more rational and fair juvenile justice system.

In December 2020, in response to the pervasive inequities in our state, Youthpraise unveiled a new youth-centered and youth-informed policy agenda titled *A New Generation of Equity*. As part of that agenda, we committed ourselves to working in collaboration with the Minnesota Coalition for Youth Justice to safely reduce youth interaction with the justice system while eliminating racial disparities and encouraging the adoption of anti-racist and culturally sound practices within the justice system without compromising public safety. The three bills before the Committee today are important steps in achieving these aims.

The reforms in these three bills will provide key protections for young people currently involved the juvenile justice system and provide tools and safe alternatives to future involvement in the juvenile justice system. The amended changes are welcomed steps in the direction of safety and protection, equity, and accountability.



As the research has increased on child and adolescent brain development over the last fifteen years, we commonly understand there is a vast difference in development between 10 year olds and 13 year olds in terms of impulse control, decision-making, inhibition, and other executive functions. Further, we know from research articles that detention is harmful to all youth and in particular younger youth. Detention can negatively impact mental and physical well-being, slow education progress, separate youth from their support systems, negatively affect current employment and future employability, and play a determinative role in recidivism. Younger youth should not be subject to these and other potential harms that may have life-long consequences. Additionally, because of the disproportionality that exists in Minnesota's juvenile system, our black and brown communities are significantly impacted by the practices and policies addressed in these three bills. We must focus our efforts on ways to safely divert our youth from the juvenile system.

These reforms, many of which address practices that shock the conscience, are well overdue, so I urge you to support the three bills before you today.